

## POLITICAL PARTICIPANT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG YOUTH IN SARAWAK

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### ABSTRACT

*This article aims to examine the use of social media on youth participation in the political process in Kuching, Sarawak. The study relies on data obtained from 500 randomly selected youths and they have provided feedbacks through the study questionnaires. The study results show that Facebook, Twitter, Instagrams, and online news portals are the main social media used by the youth as a source of information on political news. However, few of them wrote about politics in their Facebook timeline, less than 40 percent of the respondents tweet on politics, and only 34.5 percent wrote about politics in their Instagram, and a small number of respondents responded to news in the online news portals. Among the popular online news portals for youth to obtain political news are Malaysiakini, Malaysia Today, Sarawakvoice and Sarawakiana. The findings also show that the use of social media for political activities is influenced by factors such as political efficacy, knowledge of politics and their direct participation in the political arena.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Political Efficacy, Political Knowledge and Youth Direct Political Participation.

### ABSTRAK

*Makalah ini bertujuan mengkaji penggunaan media sosial mengenai penyertaan belia dalam proses politik di Kuching, Sarawak. Kajian ini bergantung kepada data yang diperolehi daripada 500 belia yang telah dipilih secara rawak dan mereka telah memberi maklum balas melalui soal selidik kajian. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Facebook, Twitter, Instagrams, dan portal berita dalam talian adalah media sosial utama yang digunakan oleh belia sebagai sumber maklumat untuk mendapatkan berita politik. Walau bagaimanapun, tidak ramai dalam kalangan mereka menulis tentang politik dalam laman Facebook mereka, kurang daripada 40 peratus daripada responden tweet mengenai politik, dan hanya 34.5 peratus menulis tentang politik dalam akaun Instagram mereka, serta sebilangan kecil daripada responden memberi maklum balas pada berita dalam portal berita atas talian. Di antara portal berita atas talian yang popular untuk para belia mendapat berita politik adalah seperti Malaysiakini, Malaysia Today, Sarawakvoice dan Sarawakiana. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan media sosial untuk aktiviti politik dipengaruhi faktor seperti keberkesanan politik, pengetahuan tentang politik dan penyertaan langsung mereka dalam arena politik.*

**Kata Kunci:** Media Sosial, Keberkesanan Politik, Pengetahuan politik dan Penyertaan Langsung dalam Politik.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to examine the usage of social media on youth participation in political process in Kuching, Sarawak. The definition of youth by Malaysia Youth Development Policy are young adult between the ages of 15 to 40, however, the youth development programmes and activities in Malaysia are focus on young adult between the ages of 18 to 25. An international definition of youth as defined by the United Nations is young adult between the ages of 15 to 24 years. In the political arena, the required age for a person to become a candidate for the lower house is 21 years old. and 30 years old for the upper house. On average, the eligible age for political participation in the third world countries to enter the national parliament starts at the age of 25 and above (UN Global Parliamentary Report, 2012). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Fact Sheet states that young adults around the age of 15 to 25 make up one-fifth of the world's population. However, only 1.65% of the parliamentarians are in the age of 20s and 11.87% are in the age of 30s compared to the population size of the young adults around the world, young adults are not represented fairly in the parliamentary (UN Global Parliamentary Report, 2012). It is difficult to find people under the age of 35 holding a formal political leadership positions. In fact, it is a common practice to refer TO politician as "young" if the person's age is between 35 to 40 years (UN Global Parliamentary Report, 2012).

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) reports that Malaysian youth political participation is the lowest among the Commonwealth countries. Malaysia is ranked 47 out of 51 Commonwealth nations, with a score of 0.188 in the political participation domain (Commonwealth Plan Action 2007-2015). Given that youth participation in the political arena is essential in the democratic process and to facilitate the development goals of a country, youth should be given equal opportunities and should be allowed to benefit from all the programmes and policies planned by the government by encouraging meaningful political participations of the youth at all levels. Less involvement of the youth in the political arena is mainly because of lack of access to knowledge and information and the inadequate opportunities for the young people to participate in the political process. In many areas, issues concerning youth development are not being prioritised and are still considered as a new "thing" in some countries. Therefore, these have created barriers for the youth to enjoy their rights as the citizen of the country and as the nation stakeholder. Furthermore, a few factors have been identified as the obstacles which hinder the young adult from participating in the political process, decision-making process and the democratic practice in Malaysia, such as the ineffective bureaucracy and the fact that youths' interests are often taken lightly by the senior citizens (UN Review of Youth Situation in Malaysia, 2002).

The opportunities for young people to engage in the governing and decision-making process rely mainly on the political, socioeconomic and cultural context of the society. In most parts of the world young women often are being

discriminated from participating in the development process and this practice is considered as a part of social norms of the society. There are substantial evidences that current number of youth participation in formal form of political institutional process is comparably low compared to senior citizen across the world (UN Global Parliamentary Report, 2012). Despite the rights that are bestowed on them, which is to be included in the political process and democratic practice and to ensure that their rights are safeguarded, young people still feel that they are being left out in many of the government's programmes and policies. According to a research conducted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2002), argues that governments give less attention concerning youth and their interests, hence, the youth feel that they have no place to voice out their opinions. Regardless of the situation, young adults display huge interest in politics and inclination to participate in the election (UN Review of Youth Situation in Malaysia, 2002). Considering youth is as an important asset to the society, they should be empowered by providing environment on which they can have equal opportunities to the resource allocations, access to knowledge and information, and supportive government policies and participate fully in the political process.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Political development in recent years have witnessed rapid expansion of a new class of information technology commonly known as social media, which support interpersonal communication and collaboration using Internet-based platforms. Among the popular tools of social media are sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, each of which is used by hundreds of millions of people all around the world. Young adults are the major users of the technology and social media yet they are the most vulnerable users that are most likely to be influenced and affected by the social media implications. In addition, the impacts of social media have paved the way to democracy in many countries all around the world. The "social media impacts" on the youth can be theorized and measured in many ways and are studied from a wide range of field of knowledge encompass psychology, public health, cultural studies and youth behaviour studies (Sawyer, 2011; Kross et al., 2013 & Njoroge, 2013). Hilman and Trier (2013, p. 3) in Snijders and Helms (2014) referred to social media impacts as a broad range of concepts that explains how an individual's action is affected by other people because of the process of interaction. They suggest that social media impact is a "natural process, but can be used by people or businesses to change a person's attitude or behaviour" which can either resulted in positive or negative actions. The social media impacts can be differentiated into two categories which are normative social impacts and informational social impacts (Snijders & Helms, 2014). Normative social impact explains on how an individual is influenced based on norms (Snijders & Helms, 2014). He classified normative social impacts into three sub-types: 1. Compliance occurs when an individual accepts the opinion of others, hoping that this would lead to a favourable reaction of others; 2. Identification means that an individual accepts the opinion of others to maintain a desired relationship; and, 3. Internalization represents the strongest

influence and occurs when an individual accepts and believes the opinion of others both in public and private (Kelman, 1985 in Snijders & Helms, 2014). On the other hand, informational social impacts referred to the action of “accepting information or advice from a person who may not have previously been known as a friend or colleague” (Snijders & Helms, 2014). The most accepted example of informational social impact is the user-generated content which may result in the changing of belief of individuals as the consequences of accepting other person’s view, opinion or belief about certain issues.

Hillman and Trier (2013) discuss the impact of social media from the perspective of social media theorist, where individuals’ actions are influenced by the interaction with other people. They suggest that social influence theory can be applied to explain the social media impact phenomenon as it shared many similar features. Many recent studies have now focused on the appropriateness of applying social influence theories to explain the social media influences or impacts. However, it is still difficult to measure and exploit the actual effects and impacts of social influence and thus make it harder to observe the explicit impacts of social media emergence (Snijders & Helms, 2014). On top of that, there is no definite definition to what influence or impact social media has, but, Hebert (2013) describes the impact as the art of creating action. He added that in the context of social media impacts, creating action is referred to the act produced upon receiving or accepting topics that one finds interesting. In addition, Douai *et al.*, (2014) confirms that almost every study suggested different definitions of “social media impacts” which can be divided into 29 basic definitions. The similarities found in all the offered definitions is that they instituted the idea that social media simplify and promote numerous channels of communication while the differences in these definitions are incapability to differentiate between the platforms used to create content and the technology application used to utilize the platforms (Douai *et al.*, 2014).

The emergence of social media in the last two decades has brought massive changes towards the behavioural of the society by opening space for free discussion and debate. Majority of young adults are shifting instantaneously from the traditional media such as television and radio to the social media. Given that the average time spend by young people to surf internet in Malaysia is 19 hours per week (Bates, 2010), it is not a surprise to observe social media impacts are much on young adults as they are the heavy users of the social media sites. This social media rage has led to a conflux of questions regarding their impacts on the society, while it is recognized that the “social media affects people’s living styles and it is an on-going process to identify the nature of these influence in every society and country specially on youth” (Shabir *et al.*, 2014).

Statistic from the Internet World Stats shows as for 2012, from the Malaysian total population of 29,179,952, 60.7 % or 17,723,000 are Internet users with 90.0% of the internet users have accounts for social media sites (Kemp, 2012). In addition, the total Facebook subscribers in Malaysia is 46.0% or 13,389,520 (Bates, 2010). It

is reported that Malaysian citizen view social networking sites 14 billion times every month (Burson-Masteller, 2012). On the average, Malaysian youth spend 19 hours per week surfing the internet (Bates, 2010). In fact, the most active internet users are also from the youth around the age of 20 to 24 years in which nearly 57 % of them are using the internet regularly and spend on the average 22.3 hours online per week (Factbrwoser, n.d). With the popularity of social media in Malaysia skyrocketing in the recent years, many scholars have suggested about the relationship between social media and political change in a country (Fiske, 1996) and social media and youth politicization (Prensky, 2001; Jenkins, 2006; Vadrevu & Lim, 2012). Swist, Collin, McCormark et al. (2015) discussed about eight key domains of social media impacts on children and young people which among that are about social media impacts on young people in terms of civic and political participation. It is with the emergence of social media that the correlation between youth, politics and social media seems to have intensified. The social media emergence appears to have become the new carrier of change in the political world especially among the young people which have been proven through numerous of events in Malaysia in the recent years.

Stranberg (2013) suggests that social media particularly Facebook and Twitter result in an enormous effect to the users to engage in the political activities. According to him, although many of the social media users have no interest and motivation to politics but by engaging themselves with the social media, they will consciously access the political content through the social media. The study suggests that in the general elections, social media are utilised as a tool for political dissemination and social media use for political activities is one of the indicators of political participation as reflects by the number of turnout and voting (Stranberg, 2013). Social media or “Web 2.0” have many features and characteristics that allow active interaction between the users and the application through the user-generated content (Komito & Bates, 2009). It is with these unique features that enable social media to be democratically interactive contradict to the traditional media such as radio, television or newspaper. The greater opportunities for a deeper and interactive method to media derive from the fast evolving world of online, independent news media in which it leads us to the Habermas’s ideal of the public sphere (Azizuddin, 2014). Habermas (1989) describes the democratic ideal of a public sphere, as a space that permits citizens to interact, study, and debate on the public issues of the day without fear of immediate reprisal from the political and economic powers (Beers, 2006: 116), (Azizuddin, 2014). It supports the process of “democratisation of knowledge and information, transforming people from being content consumers into content producers” (Azizuddin, 2014). Social media offers a free and open space for the citizens to throw out their opinions. In addition, the criteria of social media which are inexpensive and accessible for everyone have allowed many people to enjoy their free of opinions and speeches by publishing their own user-generated contents or spreading information unlike in the traditional media where people need to have a certain skills and resources to publish information. In addition, another feature that is shared by both social media and traditional media are the ability to reach a large number of audiences.

However, social media evidently has greater potential for democratisation as it has the ability to reach out an enormous amount of audiences in a short length of time regardless of the distances and time. Social media has succeeded in overcoming the information barriers which hinder people from getting access to information before this. Furthermore, the rate at which news flows in social media sites is proven to have effects on how the users are influenced and direct their opinion of political and social economic life (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). Azizuddin (2014) suggests that the interactive traits of social media such as “viral” in distribution, immediately global in reach, and relatively inexpensive to produce” have made the social media a reasonable host for the public sphere as defined by Habermas. In addition, Habermas (2006) argues that the Internet has a subversive effect on intellectual life in authoritarian regimes, and may threaten to bring down the regime itself (as cited in Azizuddin, 2014) which is why in the 12th. Malaysia General Election (GE12) in March 2008, the failure of Barisan Nasional (BN) to acknowledge the important role of social media in promoting the democracy had led them to lost many seats to the opposition parties as discussed earlier. Hence, it is clear that social media can become one of the instruments to create political wave to discredit the government which can be seen during the last two general elections.

The argument of social media as a tool of democratisation is further supported by Kellner (1999) in Azizuddin (2014), he argues that the emergence of Internet has extended the realm for democratic participation and debate as well as creating an open public space for political intervention. The social media provides a platform for open debates, spread, ideas, information and opinion as well as possibilities for manipulation, social control, and the promotion of conservative positions. Engagement in the social media activities such as computer bulletin boards and group discussion is what Kellner refers as “cyberspace democracy” (Azizuddin, 2014). Therefore, many of the politicians have turned into social media to attract the audiences to spread their ideologies and beliefs as well as to promote their own agendas and interests. This was undeniable as in GE12 when many of the oppositions parties turn to alternative media to promote their views and dissensions against the ruling party since the mainstream media are directly being controlled by the government (Azizuddin, 2014). In addition, the mainstream media had lost its credibility to the audiences, as many of the Malaysian citizens during that time have started to seek information and knowledge on their own through the social media.

According to Vadrevu and Lim (2012), the number of internet users as of 2011 in Malaysia is 17,723,000 with the internet penetration of 61.7 % and 12,060,340 of the Facebook users and 42.0 Facebook penetrations, suggests that Malaysia is among the Southeast Asian countries that have a higher internet penetration besides Brunei and Singapore. Given the large number, the potential power of social media should be acknowledged as a powerful medium to spread information and knowledge. With many repressive laws that control the political environment of the country as well as the citizen’s rights to political freedom and freedom of speech (Azizuddin, 2009), social media emergence suggest an



alternative media for the opposition parties to reach out to the people. In the past, the government monopoly over the print media is arguably undeniable. Almost all the main broadcasting stations such as RTM1, RTM2, TV3, NTV7, 8TV and TV9 are under the government ownership (Azizuddin, 2014). In addition, print media such as The News Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad (NSTP) which is one of the largest publishing groups that publish leading newspaper titles such as the New Straits Times, Berita Harian and Harian Metro is owned by the government in which the government owned 43 percent equity interest in the company (Azizuddin, 2010). Generally, both print and broadcast media news coverage and editorials are in favour of the government (Freedom House, 2007). Therefore, the information and knowledge are limited and often are being manipulated in the government favour. After the emergence of the new media in recent years, the civil societies in Malaysia have turned into the alternative media, particularly social media to obtain information and knowledge about the real political world in Malaysia.

In fact, the social movements in Malaysia have also become stronger due to the social media. In addition, the young people have become impatient with the BN's reluctance and resistance to change (Azizuddin, 2009). One of the most noticeable event that reflects the power of social media as a tool to spread knowledge and information is during the Permatang Pauh by-election in August 26, 2008 where more than 90 % of the voters between the ranges of age of 21 to 30 vote for Anwar Ibrahim (Azizuddin, 2009). One of the main reasons that have led to the outcome was that young voters have retrieved the political news from the opposition alternative media which they assumed as more credible than the mainstream media (Azizuddin, 2009). Mainstream media who offers "biased reporting, combined with factors like manipulative publicity and mass advertising have been described as "the colonisation of the public sphere by systems of authority" (Soules, 2001 : 1)" (Azizuddin, 2014).

In fact, the GE-13: Election Watch Report reveals the biased media coverage via federal television or the mainstream media which is followed by the "selective interpretation of laws and enforcement have adversely affected the opposition more frequent than others". The emergence of the social media has given the Malaysian people a new hope to be able to retrieve information, critical views that challenges the government as the mainstream media are being tightly under the government's control (Azizuddin, 2009).

The recent alternative media news coverage has become the turning point for the Malaysian and the opposition parties to reach out the audiences. According to a study by Shabir et al. (2014) to find out social media impacts on youth, 48.62% of the respondent agree and 30.69% of the respondents strongly agree that social media is the source to obtain knowledge and information. In addition, the study found that social media plays an important role to create political awareness among youth, where 47.93% of the respondents agree and 24.48% of the respondents strongly agree about the statement It is important to note that the intention to obtain political

information and knowledge have positive impacts on the political participation of the citizens. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) in Indriani (2014) claimed that the more knowledgeable the voters are, they are more likely to be interested in the political activities, involve in numerous forms of political participation and engage to the democratic principles. The study suggests that the principles of democracy are at the best when the people are politically informed (Indriani, 2014).

In addition, political knowledge is proven to have positive impact on the political participation (Indriani, 2014). Kaid *et al.* (2007) suggest that young people less participation in the political process is due to the lack of political knowledge. The correlation between the political knowledge and political participation is indeed undeniable. A study by Jung *et al.* (2011) found a significant relationship between political knowledge and political participation. Therefore, it is interesting to study whether the youth's lack of interest in politics could be changed through the use of social media as they are constantly engaging themselves actively on the platforms. However, given that alternative media has proven to be unbiased towards the opposition, Gunter (2009) has pointed out about the credibility of social media as news sources. While many have turned into alternative media, the advocates of mainstream media have challenged the legitimacy of the alternative media. The advocates of mainstream media have raised questions whether the news publish on social media truly has represented "news" (Gunter, 2009). The mainstream media also include issues such as statutory and voluntary codes of practice that should be followed by the mainstream news unlike in alternative media where people are free to post anything they like.

Political knowledge is considered as the most influential factors that lead to political participation. The most popular definition of political knowledge was created by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) who conceptualized it as the series of actual political information stored in the long-term memory (Indriani, 2014). Many scholars believed that political knowledge is an essential factor that motivates a person to participate in politics. Delli Carpini (2006) as in Indriani (2014) claimed that political knowledge has a positive link with political behavior and decision making. It was suggested that as the citizen become more knowledgeable, apparently they will become more active on politics. A study by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) found a strong impact of political knowledge on voting probability of an individual. In addition, individuals who are well informed in one area of politics tend to be informed across other areas of politics as well.

Political participation requires some material, cognitive resources, and paramount among these is information. Individuals who have adequate political knowledge are able to understand their own interests and how to participate in the political process effectively. In fact, they tend to be more politically efficacious and have the confidence and ability to participate in the marketplace of political ideas (DelliCarpini & Keeter, 1996). On the other hand, it was discovered that younger generation is presumed to have less knowledge when compared to elder generation. Some scholars suggest that young adults lack participation in politics is due to their lack of political knowledge (Indriani, 2014).



Political Efficacy was first coined by Campbell, Gurin and Miller (1954) as cited in Zhang et al. (2010) as they identified the impact of political efficacy on the voting behavior of the citizen. Political efficacy is defined as the feeling that an individual citizen can have an important role in affecting the political and social transformation (Indriani, 2014). In other words, it refers to “individual’s belief that his or her attempts can impact political processes” (Tan as cited in Indriani, 2014). Kenski and Stroud (2006), Lee (2006) and Tedesco (2007) categorised political efficacy into two dimensions which are internal political efficacy and external political efficacy (as cited in Indriani, 2014). According to them: Internal political efficacy is an individual’s belief about their competence to understand and to participate actively in politics. On the other hand, external political efficacy is an individual’s belief about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens’ requests (Indriani, 2014). In addition, Abraham and Aldrich (1982) argue that the people should first believe that they have the ability to make a change before they are able to realise the value of participating in the political process (as cited in Indriani, 2014). It is suggested that individual without the feeling of competency and beliefs that he has a crucial role in making change, will only have a little stimulus to participate in the political process. Levy (2013) states that individual who has a high level of political efficacy is more likely to engage with any act of participating in the political process such as vote, involve in political activism, use informational news media and psychologically participate in politics (as cited in Indriani, 2014).

Political Participation is defined by Verba (1995) as the “behaviour that could affect government action – either directly by influencing the public policies that are implemented or indirectly by influencing the elections of political actors creating those policies” (Indriani, 2014). In addition, Kenski and Stroud (2006) refer political participation as the engagement in the political activities such as donating to a campaign or influencing others to vote. In other words, political participation is defined as “an activity of an individual or a group to actively participate in political life by choosing the President and directly or indirectly influencing public policy” (Indriani, 2014).

Moreover, commonly people explains political participation as the set of activities perform by the citizen with the purpose to influence the government’s decision (Conway in Vitak *et al.*, 2011) Apparently, the word “participation” refers taking part in certain activities with other people as defined by Oxford English Dictionary. Hence, political participation is the act of taking part in any political activities such as “political campaign, seeking party funding, being part of political campaign team, a member of political party, a volunteer of political party, seeking support for a candidate, trying to persuade others, contacting politicians, donating money, joining political discussions, signing a petition, attending a political rally, and casting a vote at the election” (Gaffar, 1997; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Vitak *et al.*, 2011; Tang & Lee, 2013; Yamamoto *et al.*, 2013 as cited in Indriani, 2014).

The definition of political participation is further sorted into two categories which are direct political participation and indirect political participation. Direct political participation is the expression of a political interests and a political aim. This includes everything that has a direct influence whether it has a political intention or not but still influences the society (Pausch, 2012). On the other hand, the indirect political participation is a voluntary involvement in social activities or networks with political implications but without a clear defined political interests or political aims (Fuchs, 1984 as cited in Pausch, 2012). The central intentions for the involvement not necessarily with political intentions but can be solidarity with others for self-fulfilment (Pausch, 2012). Therefore, political participation according to this study includes any involvement in the political activities with the conscious motivation as well as any acts that affect or influence some people although it is driven by political motivation.

In addition, Cohen *et al.* (n.d) studied about participatory politics which is another form of political participation often facilitated through the use of social media and can also be practiced offline. They define participatory politic as “interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern”. They suggest that these acts are not driven by deference to elites or formal groups. According to Cohen *et al.* participatory politic acts have the capability to: 1. reach large audiences and mobilize networks, often online, on behalf of a cause; 2. help shape agendas through dialogue with, and provide feedback to political leaders (on- and offline); and 3. enable participants to exert greater agency through the circulation or forwarding of political information (e.g., links) as well as through the production of original content, such as a blog or letter to the editor. (Cohen *et al.*, n.d).

The study also suggests four factors that make participatory politics important (Cohen *et al.*, n.d): firstly, it enables individual to participate with greater independence in the political realm, circumventing traditional gatekeepers of information and influence, such as newspaper editors, political parties, and interest groups”. Secondly, it aids renegotiation of political power and control with the traditional political entities that are now looking for ways to engage with the citizens. Observe how the mainstream media are trying to facilitate a controlled engagement with their audiences through the use of social media. Thirdly, political participation in the practiced online provide for greater creativity and voice, as participants produce original content using video, images, and text. Fourth, support individuals capability to reach a large number of audiences and to mobilize others through their social media sites in an easy and inexpensive way. Many studies have suggested that the use of social media may have a positive relationship with the political participation. A recent study by Stranberg (2013) has proven that social media usage can be used to increase political participation.

In addition, Vitak *et al.* (2011) added that there exist a significant correlation between the intensity use of Facebook for political purposes and political participation of college students as the students utilize social media sites to obtain political

information and knowledge to improve their political efficacy. Furthermore, Kaid *et al.* (2007) as cited in Indriani (2014) suggest that young adult lack of engagement in politics is largely attributed to their lack of political knowledge. The most common act of political participation is voting – a political action that enables the majority of the people to have a say in the elections (Paletz *et al.*, 2015). However, it should be noted that the form of political participation is beyond that which includes any act or behaviour that may directly or indirectly influence the political process. In addition, Vitak *et al.* (2011) describe a few political activities via the Facebook such as “posting status updates about politics; posting political messages on friends’ walls; writing and sharing political notes within their networks; giving comments on their friend’s posts; sharing political opinions; joining political groups; becoming a fan of candidates; and downloading political applications” which could have influenced other social media to participate in the political process.

## METHODOLOGY

The population in this study are Malaysian youths between the age range of 21 to 40 who are members of social media sites and are currently living in Kuching, Sarawak. The reason why this study chooses young adults between the age range of 21 to 40 years old is because the voting age begins at 21; meanwhile the youth are referred to as young adults between the age range of 15 to 40. Hence, this study believes that youth around this age is the most suitable candidates to become the respondents for this study. The sample size for this study is 500 young adults who are currently living in Kuching, Sarawak. The study questionnaires were randomly distributed to 500 respondents.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Use of Social Media*

Respondents in this study were asked to identify the types of social media that they used to obtain information on politics. The result of the study shows that 42 percent of the respondents rely on Facebook to obtain news on politics. In addition, 40 percent post or write about politics and share postings on their timeline. The study also shows that 50.5 percent of the respondents click ‘like’ or follow any political pages/political party pages/politicians fan pages or on other Facebook accounts. However, only 17 percent of the respondents responded to any event invitations by clicking “going” to political events organized. This is followed by 21 percent who discuss political issues on private messages in Facebook.

The other social media channel used by youth in Kuching to obtain information on politics is Twitter. Result of the study shows that 20 percent of the respondents used Twitter as a tool to tweet about politics. Re-tweeting or quoting tweets about politics 22 percent, 26 percent follows tweets by politicians. Replying tweets about politics 19.5 percent replied tweets on politics. And 15.5 percent of the respondents participate in political discussions. Some of the tweets that the

respondents follow are owned by the Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak, and the Minister of Youth and Sports, Hon. Khairy Jamaluddin.

In addition to the above, the results of the study shows that only 16 percent of the respondents used online news portal as a source to obtains news on politics. However, they seldom made comments on the blogs or online news portals. Some of the major online news portals visited by the respondents in this study via the internet for political news are Malaysia Kini, Malaysia Today, Sarawakvoice and Sarawakiana.

Aside from the above social media, 22 percent of the respondents in this study used Instagram as a source of information related to politics, however, only 17 percent responded to political postings to their Instagram, and 21 percent follow politicians' accounts on Instagram.

### ***Political Knowledge***

Political knowledge is one of the variables in political communication research. In this study, respondents were asked to respond to seven items in the construct as shown in table one below. The findings of the study show the overall average means for political knowledge constructs is 3.576, which shows that the respondents agree to most of the items in the political knowledge construct.

**Table 1: Respondents Responses on Political Knowledge Construct**

Statements	Respondents responses				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Knew when is the General GE13	8 %	16%	36.6%	28.5%	11%
Knew who is the Prime Minister	5%	7.5%	27.5%	35.5%	24.5%
Voting age in Malaysia is 21 years old	2%	2%	18%	36 %	42%
Knowledge about the voting age lead me to register as a voter	5%	10%	25%	36%	24%
Know BERSIH and its objectives	4.5%	10.5%	30.5%	33.5%	21.5%
Social media enhance political knowledge	1%	8.5%	31.5%	40%	10%
Knowledge about politics influence my decision to vote on GE13	5%	5.5%	31.5%	34.5%	23.5%

Majority of the respondents remained neutral (36.5%) in their responds to the statement of "I know when is the 13th. Malaysia General Election (GE13) was held". 28.5 percent agreed to the statement. In addition, majority of the participants agreed (35.5%) that they know who the Prime Minister of Malaysia was during GE 13. Majority of the respondents are aware that the voting age in Malaysia is 21 years old. The result shows that 42.5 percent strongly agree, followed by 35.5percent who agree to the statement. Thirty six percent agreed, and 24 percent strongly agreed that their knowledge about the voting age had led them to register as a voter.

Based on table 1 above, 33.5 percent of the respondents agree, and 21.5 percent strongly agree to the statement “I know what is BERSIH and the objectives of its inception. BERSIH is a Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Malay: Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil) or Bersih (meaning clean in Malay) is a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which seeks to reform the current electoral system in Malaysia to ensure free, clean and fair elections. Therefore, we can infer that majority of the respondents knew the existence of BERSIH through social media. This study also found that 40 percent of the respondents agree to the statement that the existence of social media had enhanced their knowledge about national and state politics. The respondents knowledge about politics had influence their decisions on GE13 where 34.5 percent agreed and 23.5 percent strongly agreed to the last items in the construct.

### ***Political Efficacy***

In political science, political efficacy is the citizens’ faith and trust in government and their belief that they can understand and influence political affairs. The finding shows the overall the mean for political efficacy is 3.051 leading to conclusion that the respondents answered neutral to most of the questions concerning their political efficacy. Table 2 below shows the respondents’ responses to nine statements under political efficacy construct.

**Table 2: Respondents Responses to Political Efficacy Constructs**

Statements	Respondents responses				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Qualified to participates in political activities	18.5%	21%	35.5%	17.5%	7.5%
My votes makes the difference	8%	8%	43%	27%	15%
Believe every votes counts in the election	9%	10%	31%	33%	17%
I have a say in what the governments do	8%	8%	25%	3%	26%
My representative cares about my opinion	19%	17%	37%	20%	7%
I am well informed about politics government than most people	15%	19.5%	41%	17.5%	8%
Good understanding of political issues in the country	8.5%	19.5%	42.5%	21.5%	8%
My actions of social media could have impact on others	12.5%	19.5%	38%	19.5%	10.5%

The results of the study show minority of the respondents answered “neutral” to the statement “I considered myself as qualified to participate in politics”. Followed by those who answered disagree (21.0%), strongly disagree (18.5%), agree (7.5%) and strongly agree (7.5%). In fact, this statement received the lowest mean (2.7) among other constructs in the questionnaire. In addition, majority of the respondents answered neutral (43.0%) towards the statement “My vote makes differences in the election”. Followed by those who answered agree (27.0%) and

strongly agree (15.0%) to the statement, while the rest of the participants answered strongly disagree (8.0%) and disagree (7.0%). This study found that 32.5% of the respondents answered neutral towards the statement “I believe that every vote counts in the election”. Furthermore, 31.5% of the respondents agree and 16.5% strongly agree that their votes count in the election. On the one hand, 10.0% of the respondents disagree and 9.5% strongly disagree to the statement. Majority of the respondents answered neutral (36.5%) towards the statement “people like me do have say about what the government does”. The rest of the respondents agree (32.5%) and strongly agree (13.5%) to the statement (see Table 2). Majority of the respondents answered neutral (37.0%) to the statement “my political representatives care about my opinion”, followed by 19.5 percent of the respondents who agreed while only 7.5 percent strongly agreed to the statement. On the one hand, 19.0% of the respondents answered strongly disagree and another 17.0% disagree to the statement.

Table 2 displays the percentage of respondents’ responses towards the statement “I think I am well informed about the politics and government than most people”. The results of the findings show that 41 percent of the respondents choose to be neutral, followed by 17.5 percent agree, and only 8 percent strongly agreed to the statement.

Majority of the respondents respond neutral towards the statement “I feel that I have a good understanding about important political issues happening in our country”, followed by 21.5% who agreed to the statement. The other respondents responses are disagree (19.5%), strongly disagree (8.5%) and strongly agree (8.0%). Lastly, about 38 percent of the respondents remained neutral to the statement “I think that my political actions through the social media could have impacts on others”. 19.5 percent agreed and 11 percent strongly agreed to the statement in the construct.

### ***Direct Political Participation***

This section discusses about the respondents’ direct political participation. The average mean for this construct is 1.808 indicating that most of the respondents had never directly participate in the political process. The study found that only 31.5 percent of the respondents have registered themselves as voters. The findings also revealed more than half of the respondents have not registered themselves as voters although they have reached the voting age in Malaysia.

In addition, only 14.5 percent of the respondents said that they have at least once voted in the general election while the others have never voted in the general election. Hence, the study found that half of those who had registered themselves as voters have never voted in the election. In addition, 36 percent said that they had at least once participated in events/programmes related to politics while 64 percent said they have never once take part in events/programmes related to politics. Only 10.5 percent of the respondents said they have at least once participated in



demonstrations while the rest of the respondents (89.5%) said they have never participate in any demonstration. However 23.5 percent had been involved in political campaigns.

The study also found that majority of the youths in Kuching, Sarawak has never been involved in signing petitions related to politics. The result of the survey show only 12 percent of the youth said that they had at least once signed petition related to politics while the majority never sign any. Based on the result of the study, only 21.5 percent of the youth said that they have at least once worn clothes to show support for any political party. And only 16.5 percent said they are a member of NGOs while the rest said that they are not a member of any NGOs. The percentage of respondents who responded when asked whether they have at least once contacted any politicians or government officers are relatively small. Only 11.5 percent answered that they have at least once contacted any politicians or government officers while the rest of the participants answered no to the question.

Political information obtained from social media are often screened and stored as political knowledge in youth's memory. Those who have high frequency of social media usage for political activities also have greater political knowledge. They may obtain more political information on social media which influenced their political learning process and increase their political knowledge. When the participants used social media for political activities, it might increase their feeling that they have a significant role in political process. They might believe that their attempts have an impact in bringing about political change. The result indicates that the effect of social media use for political activities was significant to political efficacy.

It seems possible that young adults are more acquainted with the social media nature in recent years. Social media enable young adults to obtain political information directly from the political parties or politicians. Social media also facilitates young adults to experience politics at a more familiar interpersonal level by interacting and communicating directly with the politician. Hence, as the young adult are more aware about current political issues in Malaysia, they become more self-aware about the politics and their role as citizen.

The finding of the study is highly unexpected. It does not support the previous studies by Vitak et al. (2011), Yamamoto et al. (2014) and Indriani (2014). They found that political knowledge is an important predictor of political participation. In contrast, this study failed to identify any relationship between political knowledge and political participation. It can be argued that young adults might have sufficient political knowledge, but they did not have interest or motivation to participate in politics. Polat (2005) as in Indriani (2014) suggests that without any self-interest or self-motivation, the role of social media to increase political participation becomes less important. Hence, further study is needed to explain this matter.

This result supports the relationship between social media use for political activities and political participation which has been discussed in the previous study by Vitak et al. (2011) and Indriani (2014). Vitak et al. (2011) who found that social media use for political activities on Facebook was highly correlated with political participation. Based on the finding, it can be seen that higher social media usage for political activities resulted to greater political participation.

Commonly in many previous studies, the researchers only include two most common social media platform namely Facebook and Twitter. In this study, the researcher had attempted to include other social media platforms such as Blogs, news portal, Instagram and messaging platform. Nevertheless, as the social media is evolving from time to time, there is a need to examine other platform of social media which is not enlisted in this study.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The emergences of social media in the last few years are believed to have positive linkage with the shift of political landscape in Malaysia. The use of social media for political activities is believed to have the ability to replace the traditional mass media which were influenced by their owner's political interest. Considering the fact that social media continues to integrate in people's daily lives and that it is fervently used by young people worldwide, researchers also continue to examine this topic from various angles, and this particular study aimed to add a step further in this direction.

The findings of this study demonstrate that when used for political activities, social media may increase political efficacy, political knowledge, and political participation. The results also demonstrate that the frequency of general social media usage for political activities had significant impacts on youth participation in the political process in Kuching, Sarawak. Youths' direct political participation was positively influenced by political efficacy but not the political knowledge which is highly unexpected. Therefore, further studies are needed to understand other intermediary factors which may influence these causal relationships.

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